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Service-Learning class inspires student to form music club

When Julia Sayavong '18 enrolled in a Service-Learning Advanced Writing and Research class as a freshman, it opened her eyes to new ways to pursue career goals.

“My Service-Learning class really changed the way I view education,” says Julia, a sophomore liberal studies major in the [Department of Education](#) in the [School of Education and Counseling Psychology](#) who aspires to be an elementary school teacher. “With our instructor, Caroline Hanssen, we talked about flaws and social injustice in the education system, but it inspired me to be a teacher even more. I want to do something about it. I want to do something good.”

The desire to act is evident in Julia’s role at Venetia Valley School in San Rafael. In 2014 through her Service-Learning class, she worked as a teaching assistant and had such a positive experience, with the students that she returned this fall as a Service-Learning Program Leader to devote more hours. Julia, who plays the piano, guitar, ukulele and cow bell, decided to share her love of music with students at Venetia Valley. She established a music club and her students are in the process of producing a music video on bullying.

Julia’s goal is for students to express their voices through music.

“Music is a great way to inform people or promote change so I asked them ‘what are some things you want to change?’ ” she explains. “I want them to be more confident and make something that they are proud of so they can feel a sense of accomplishment and feel like each one of them can bring an idea to life.”

Julia meets twice a week with the sixth graders for about a half hour during lunch. Each session they create lyrics from open discussions about current events that impact them, from bullying and racism to Donald Trump and Kim Kardashian.

Julia’s connection with Venetia Valley is an example of a larger partnership between the school and [Dominican’s Service-Learning Program](#), which creates opportunities for numerous Dominican students to enrich their course work while building positive relationships and learning about educational issues facing marginalized youth and how schools like Venetia Valley seek to address them. According to Julia van der Ryn, Director of the Service-Learning Program, multiple Service-Learning and student leaders are collaborating with Venetia Valley to assist the school in achieving its goal to have all students attend college. Currently Dominican students in a Expository Writing class are working in a classrooms at Venetia Valley and a watercolor class led by Lynn Sondag, chair of the [Department of Art, Art History and Design](#), is involved in Venetia Valley’s after school program.

The Service-Learning Program is supporting and nurturing Julia’s music club and her sense of civic responsibility.

“I think it’s a great program to really think in depth. After I finish work at Venetia Valley and I’m writing my reflection, I’m really thinking about “What happened today and why,” Julia says. “I’ve learned so much. I’ve learned to reflect upon my experiences addressing the joys and difficulties I find, including the flaws I find in myself.”

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